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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LISBON 000137

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [AF](#) [PU](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PORTUGUESE DEFMIN; HELP
TO ISAF ON THE WAY

REF: LISBON 136

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR STEPHENSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b, d)

[¶1.](#) (C/NF) SUMMARY. Ambassador met March 4 with Portugal's Minister of Defense to discuss a range of issues. The Minister said Portugal's second ISAF OMLT will deploy to Afghanistan before the end of March and the medical unit is ready to deploy to Kabul Airport but is held up by administrative issues with the French. Portugal will also send a C-130 to support Afghan election activities, but that contribution will be difficult if elections are advanced from the current August date. The Minister believes that the runway and airspace training proposals for Lajes Air Base in the Azores are moving forward and expects the MOD to complete reviews soon. The Portuguese are monitoring events in Guinea-Bissau and would welcome assistance from the U.S. in helping to build institutions there. In the immediate term, Portugal will look to raise four million euros for the upcoming elections in Guinea-Bissau. END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (U) On March 4, Ambassador Stephenson met with Portuguese Minister of Defense Nuno Severiano Teixeira and Secretary of State for Defense (Deputy Minister) Joao Mira Gomes.

ISAF

[¶3.](#) (C/NF) DefMin Teixeira confirmed that the second Portuguese Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) will deploy to Afghanistan before the end of March and that it is not a replacement for the current Portuguese OMLT. Teixeira added that the 15-person medical team is ready to deploy to Kabul Airport, but is held up by administrative issues with the French, who currently lead the ISAF contingent at the airport. Teixeira and Mira Gomes noted that Portugal is committed to contribute a C-130 in support of the Afghan elections, envisioned for August, but if elections are moved up, it would be difficult to deploy the aircraft.

[¶4.](#) (C/NF) Mira Gomes explained that, from the MOD's perspective, a deployment of Portugal's National Guard (GNR) for a Police Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (POMLT)

was unlikely. First, he noted that the GNR is stretched thin by operations in East Timor and the Balkans -- with the latter commitment due to expand. Moreover, the GNR's previous deployment to NTM-I in Iraq occurred when the then-Prime Minister wanted to get around the then-President's objections to sending MOD troops to Iraq. This was, Mira Gomes explained, a unique situation.

15. (C/NF) Teixeira and Mira Gomes took on board our desire for Portugal to reintroduce combat troops, but suggested that the redeployment of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to ISAF would be difficult in a Portuguese election year. Nonetheless, they are standing by for a "formal request," suggesting that they could at least do the policy review before Portugal's autumn elections.

GUINEA-BISSAU

16. (C/NF) Teixeira said the GOP is monitoring events in Guinea-Bissau closely and would welcome U.S. support to build institutions there. In the immediate term, the GOP will look to all partners to raise four million euros for upcoming elections. On a broader perspective, Teixeira was interested in trilateral cooperation possibilities between Guinea-Bissau, Portugal, and the United States. Mira Gomes raised the recent U.S. Army demining program in Guinea-Bissau, in which the Portuguese Army participated.

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

17. (C/NF) Mira Gomes said the Portuguese MOD has been reluctant to approve military-to-military staff talks between the Africa Command and the Portuguese General Staff, because

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the latter is not empowered to commit the GOP to specific trilateral engagement activities absent a political-level decision. Mira Gomes was open to the idea of using staff talks to identify cooperation projects as a first step and indicated he was ready to receive direct communications from U.S. Africa Command on its proposal for the staff talks. Separately, Mira Gomes said an engagement activity involving Portuguese military serving alongside U.S. contract personnel was not acceptable to the Portuguese government.

LAJES RUNWAY AND AIRSPACE TRAINING INITIATIVE

18. (C/NF) Ambassador raised the issue of the runway resurfacing at Lajes Air Base in the Azores, for which U.S. cost-sharing proposals have languished with the GOP. Teixeira and Mira Gomes had no objection, saying they had thought the project was moving forward. They recognized that the U.S. Air Force is acting in good faith and expected that the MOD's Technical Committee staff was completing its review of the U.S. proposal. Mira Gomes cautioned that the MOD had no discretionary funds and that Portugal's budget, which operates on the calendar year, will not be finalized until after autumn elections. Ambassador stressed the need to move quickly, both to secure available U.S. funds and to keep costs from rising if the runway deteriorates further or if current resurfacing bids expire. Mira Gomes promised to look into options by which the GOP could make a commitment in advance of receiving budgetary authority. On the Airspace Training Initiative proposal, Mira Gomes believed the Portuguese Air Force review was moving along and a response would be available soon.

AIR FORCE TO AIR FORCE RELATIONSHIP

19. (C/NF) Teixeira and Mira Gomes did not seem to be aware that the Portuguese Air Force Chief-of-Staff is demanding direct financial compensation from the USAF for joint training activities. Ambassador said this had led the USAF to shift three joint training exercises to other countries and that no further exercises were likely in Portugal while this policy continued. Mira Gomes promised to investigate.

IMET/SUPT

¶10. (C/NF) Teixeira raised the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, particularly in regard to its effect on the Special Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) that Portugal purchases each year. Ambassador noted we were pleased that IMET continued, even at a nominal amount, as this allowed the Portuguese to have discounted rates on SUPT and other training programs. Mira Gomes was concerned that the cost to the Portuguese of SUPT had risen by 3 million dollars this year. (Note: this is true, but it is an overall rate increase, not specific to Portugal. The Portuguese Air Force still receives a discounted rate. We have forwarded this information to Mira Gomes and the Portuguese Air Force. End note.)

BIO NOTES

¶11. (C/NF) Although recognized as a brilliant academic, Teixeira is widely considered a weak Defense Minister, not highly respected by the service chiefs, ridiculed by the press, and with little influence within the GOP. Teixeira took over the Ministry unexpectedly in 2006, when then-Foreign Minister Diogo Freitas do Amaral resigned for health reasons. The sitting Defense Minister, Luis Amado, then shifted to the MFA and Teixeira was tabbed as his replacement at the MOD. Teixeira had no prior leadership or military experience, although he had written extensively on security issues. Ironically, those writings, which were critical of the MOD, have caused him difficulties with the services. Moreover, the Interior Ministry used Teixeira's arguments to try to justify the National Guard (GNR; which is under Interior) taking roles and funds from the MOD.

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Although this attempt failed, it highlighted Teixeira's weakness. Teixeira speaks Portuguese, English, French, Spanish, and Italian fluently.

¶12. (C/NF) Secretary of State Joao Mira Gomes, however, is a near opposite of Teixeira. A power in his own right within the ruling Socialist Party, Mira Gomes is seen as the most influential figure at the Ministry of Defense. He is a career diplomat essentially on loan to the MOD, and many observers consider that he may work as much for Amado as he does for Teixeira. Mira Gomes has the respect of the service chiefs, the press, and parliamentarians. He is also one of the most forthcoming figures within the GOP and is a valuable interlocutor on a range of security issues. It was noticeable during this meeting how Teixeira frequently hesitated while speaking to glance at Mira Gomes, as though for support. Mira Gomes speaks Portuguese, English, French, and Spanish fluently.

COMMENT

¶13. (C/NF) Due to policy in the MOD (reftel), engagement at this senior level is sometimes the only way to accomplish even minor goals. Indeed, even engagement at this level is sometimes insufficient to overcome the MOD's and services' inertia. Mira Gomes broadly hinted that high-level attention from Washington will be necessary to encourage additional Portuguese ISAF contributions, even if these contributions have to be announced after the elections.

For more reporting from Embassy Lisbon and information about Portugal, please see our Intelink site:

<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/portal:portugal>

STEPHENSON